

Helping Parents Raise Active Children

Incorporating physical activity into a child's life has long-lasting health benefits. Regular physical activity helps children build and maintain strong bones, muscles and joints, protects against heart disease and lessens their chances of becoming overweight. Studies show that physically active children are not only healthier and stronger, but also do better in school, sleep better and generally grow up to be fit adults. Yet, young children are becoming less active, overweight and obese. **Butte County Children & Families Commission** recommends the following tips to help parents raise children who are physically fit and healthy:

- **Promote activity and exercise.** Being active does not mean that children have to be limited to joining a sports program or exercise class. Keeping children moving is the important thing. Give them opportunities to run around freely, learn how to throw, kick and catch. Play games such as tag, hide-and-seek, hopscotch or jump rope.
- **Keep things fun and be creative.** Have children show you how bunnies hop, cats stretch, eagles fly and dogs wag their tails. Have jumping contests with children. Include children in family chores by giving them easy tasks such as picking up toys, pulling weeds and sorting laundry. Encourage activities that your children like and enjoy.
- **Get yourself moving.** Research shows that children of parents who exercise are about six times more likely to be active than children whose parents are sedentary. In addition, parents who are obese are more likely to have children who are obese. If you want active children, it helps to be active yourself.

- **Encourage a lifelong love of physical activity.** Start incorporating regular physical activity in your children's life at a young age. It will set the foundation for good fitness habits as they grow older. Find a variety of activities that you and your children can do together regularly, such as dancing to their favorite music, playing at the park, or going for a walk around the neighborhood or to the library for a book.
- **Turn off the television and computer.** Studies show that there is a direct relationship between childhood obesity and hours spent watching television. Less time spent in front of a TV or computer, whether it's watching cartoons, playing video games or surfing the Internet, can be more time spent participating in physical activities. One of the biggest reasons children are less active today is that sitting in front of a television or computer promotes a sedentary lifestyle.

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. **Butte County Children & Families Commission, also known as First 5 Butte County**, distributes approximately \$1.5 million a year in Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet the local needs of expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5 and their families. For more information, call (530) 538-7964.

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